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# Review Article

## THE ERA OF ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM

By YONATAN L. MORSE\*

- Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 517 pp.
- Staffan Lindberg, ed. 2009. *Democratization by Elections: A New Mode of Transition*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 432 pp.
- Beatriz Magaloni. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 316 pp.
- Andreas Schedler, ed. 2006. *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 267 pp.

### INTRODUCTION

THE electoral tsunami of the third wave heralded an era of democratization and sparked a robust and widely engaging research agenda on its causes. The research program was broad, covering multiple theoretical approaches ranging from social-structural to neoinstitutional to agency-driven analysis.<sup>1</sup> However, as the post–cold war era unfolded, it became clear that much of this research suffered from a teleological bias. While not necessarily guilty of the “fallacy of electoralism,” a distinct political trajectory ending with democracy was often assumed.<sup>2</sup> In general, a process that began with liberalization led to an expansion of civil society activity and limited elections, which in turn led to unstable “halfway” houses that most often teetered toward democracy.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis was often on discreet stages of democratization—breakthrough,

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<sup>1</sup> A brief and representative example of this research would include O’Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986; Di Palma 1990; Huntington 1991; Przeworski 1991; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Kauffman and Haggard 1995; Linz and Stepan 1996; Munck and Leff 1997; and Collier 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Karl 1990.

<sup>3</sup> The “halfway” house refers to Huntington 1991.

transition, and then mercurial consolidation. Yet, as the number of electoral regimes that defied easy classification proliferated, so did the number of adjectives added to the word democracy.<sup>4</sup>

In 2002 Thomas Carothers proclaimed the end of the “transitions paradigm,” in hopes that scholarly attention would shift toward a better understanding of hybrid regimes without the baggage of assuming they would eventually become democracies.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, a conceptual shift occurred in the field of comparative politics toward the study of hybrid regimes, semiauthoritarianism, and what is now termed “electoral authoritarianism.”<sup>6</sup> In electoral authoritarian regimes incumbents hold elections that do not live up to democratic standards of freedom and fairness and therefore facilitate repeated incumbent victory. Scholars are now beginning to understand these regimes in terms of authoritarian durability and to consider how elections might actually serve distinctively authoritarian functions or supplement other authoritarian institutions in perpetuating incumbency. Concurrently, the question of democratization was not abandoned; indeed, the role of elections as a catalyst for democratization has been invigorated. The question is now whether frequent unfair elections are a double-edged sword—sustaining authoritarianism yet sowing the seeds of its downfall by providing the opposition with a set of tools and elites with incentives to defect from the ruling regime.

This article reviews four books, including two edited volumes that might be considered a second wave of literature.<sup>7</sup> Each of these books propels this new research agenda forward. The article begins by discussing the emerging debates over methodological validity with regard to concept formation and measurement. Identifying electoral authoritarian regimes requires paying greater attention to the actual quality of elections rather than observing mere procedures. These are murkier

<sup>4</sup> Collier and Levitsky 1997. See also the comments in the introduction to the updated version of Linz 2000, where he notes the shift from democracy with adjectives to authoritarianism with adjectives.

<sup>5</sup> Carothers 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Earlier works might include Zakaria 1997; Rose and Shin 2001; Brumberg 2002; Ottaway 2002; Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002; Schedler 2002; and van de Walle 2002. It is possible to make a distinction between scholars who study regimes where new incumbents have run roughshod over constitutional limitations and abused power while in office as elections have remained comparatively free and fair and those who study electoral authoritarianism. The former regimes are often noted as illiberal, defective, or diminished democracies. The distinction is quite fuzzy, as it is logical that illiberal democracies would devolve further into electoral authoritarian regimes.

<sup>7</sup> Other significant work might include Lust-Okar 2005; Posusney and Angrist 2005; Lindberg 2006; Gandhi 2008; Cox 2009; King 2009; and Blaydes 2010. However not all of these works are engaged in the specific study of electoral authoritarianism; rather, they study elections under authoritarian conditions.

waters that involve possibly subjective judgments, made even more difficult when trying to penetrate the secretive veil of authoritarianism. The article then turns to the differentiation between potentially different forms of electoral authoritarianism—competitive and hegemonic—and the conditions that might allow repeated unfair elections to become avenues for democratization. Much of this discussion hinges on distinguishing the competitiveness of elections from the competitiveness of the participant actors. Importantly, competitiveness does not have to correspond to regime weakness or opposition strength; nor does hegemony mean that the election itself was necessarily unfair.

Finally, the article discusses work that has attempted to move beyond the electoral act itself to identify those factors that determine the competitiveness of actors, including electoral institutions, regime legacies, structural conditions, and access to resources. These factors, which are likely to vary by context, impact the propensity of elections to serve as a mode of democratization rather than of authoritarian reproduction. Two of the books offer case study analyses that go a step further to trace regime evolution and to engage in comparative examination of the strength of regime institutions like the political party. Beatriz Magaloni dissects the hegemonic authoritarianism of the Mexican PRI and explores the role of large vote shares and their origins. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way present an impressive large-scale, cross-regional analysis but stress the role of structural variables as well as regime institutions in determining electoral authoritarian stability versus instability.

In a sense, the research program on electoral authoritarianism is still in its infancy.<sup>8</sup> It is defined by a significant conceptual shift and a rapid outpouring of statistical studies and plausibility probes. For that reason a review of current efforts seems especially relevant—to encourage scholars to think of ways of moderating methodological debates, synthesizing approaches, thickening concepts, and developing future theoretical frameworks that are contingent and detailed, yet also encompassing. In particular, this article argues that studies of electoral authoritarianism need to start engaging in more midrange, case-based research. Research cannot be too distant from actual cases, leading to conceptual ambiguity, nor too close to specific cases, thus failing to generate comparative leverage. Closer engagement with detailed and confined comparisons will generate more conceptual clarity and will in turn form the basis for sounder theory building and comparative analysis.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the methodological evolution of research programs, see George and Bennett 2005 and their discussion of the stages of the democratic peace literature from statistical studies to formal modeling to individual case studies and, finally, to synthesis.

## CLASSIFICATORY CHALLENGES

While several terms have proliferated recently to describe the new variety of hybrid regimes, the term “electoral authoritarianism” has seen the most common usage. Yet it is not always clear what is meant by the term or whether the study of comparative politics even needs new terminology. Schedler considers electoral authoritarianism a new, distinctively authoritarian regime type in contrast to hybrid regimes and defective democracies (pp. 4–5).<sup>9</sup> By contrast, Staffan Lindberg is less interested in categorizing regimes than in understanding the impact of repeated elections on the prospects for democratization. Nevertheless, the term “electoral authoritarianism” permeates the chapters of *Democratization by Elections* and has become standard language for several other studies.<sup>10</sup> But what exactly do we mean by electoral authoritarianism, how are we to observe it, and does it actually matter? Indeed, Schedler opens his discussion with just that question: “how do we recognize an electoral authoritarian regime when we see one?” (p. 7). Electoral authoritarianism obviously resides in a conceptual space between nonelectoral authoritarianism and actual democracy. This requires scholars to make difficult and justified distinctions between an electoral and a nonelectoral authoritarian regime, between an electoral authoritarian regime and a democracy, and between potentially different forms of electoral authoritarianism.

Authoritarian elections are by no means a new phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> Juan Linz, for example, distinguished limited pluralism and popular mobilization as defining features of authoritarianism, in contrast with totalitarian and democratic regimes.<sup>12</sup> Studies of single-party states in the 1960s and 1970s emphasized the role of limited and uncompetitive elections as a tool to maintain elite cohesion and facilitate elite recruitment.<sup>13</sup> The large literature on transitions from authoritarianism sparked by O’Donnell and Schmitter highlighted the role of liberaliza-

<sup>9</sup> For Schedler, a hybrid regime connotes uncertainty regarding whether it is authoritarian or merely stuck on a transitioning path. Similarly defective democracies, as mentioned, fulfill the basic minimalist criteria of free and fair elections yet violate norms of liberal democracy.

<sup>10</sup> A sampling of recent works explicitly using the term “electoral authoritarianism” includes Diamond 2002; Schedler 2002; Geddes 2005; Ross 2005; Way 2005; Carrion 2006; Howard and Roessler 2006; Lust-Okar 2006; Magaloni 2006; Schedler 2006; Greene 2007; Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; and Bogaards 2009.

<sup>11</sup> These are critiques made by Armony and Schamis 2006; Snyder 2006; and Brownlee 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Linz 2000.

<sup>13</sup> The early studies of single-party regimes in the developing world often addressed the role of elections. See, for example, Hodgkin 1961; Morgenthau 1964; Zolberg 1966; Coleman and Rosburg 1970; and Huntington and Moore 1970. This literature persisted with a more specific focus on authoritarian elections in the 1970s. See, for example, the essays in the edited volume by Hermet, Rose, and Rouquie 1978.

tion as a catalyst for further democratization. Within that context, elections were often restored in a limited sense—either locally or only for legislatures. These authoritarian elections theoretically laid the groundwork for further strides toward democratic reform.

What then differentiates electoral authoritarianism from elections in authoritarian regimes? Schedler writes that

[e]lectoral authoritarian regimes play the game of multiparty elections by holding regular elections for the chief executive and a national legislative assembly. Yet they violate the liberal-democratic principles of freedom and fairness so profoundly and systematically as to render elections instruments of authoritarian rule rather than “instruments of democracy.” (p. 3)

There are several parts of this definition that are crucial. First, elections need to be regular—they do not act as a onetime pressure valve but are incorporated into the common practices of the regime. Second, the presence of multicandidate elections for national executives *and* a national legislative assembly is important. This distinction between legislative and executive elections is used in other conceptual work such as Roessler and Howard’s analysis of post–cold war regime trajectories, but it is not always clear whether it is always followed. Thus, for example, Larry Diamond, in his work on electoral authoritarianism, does not note the specific combination of executive and legislative elections.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Brownlee and Lust-Okar (in Lindberg) use the term electoral authoritarianism yet include monarchies and liberalized autocracies such as Syria in their comparisons—regimes that by Schedler’s standards would be classified as closed.<sup>15</sup>

Is this a distinction without a difference? In several electoral authoritarian regimes, the executive election is so constrained as to be essentially noncompetitive. Moreover, the electoral dynamics present in electoral authoritarian regimes might replicate themselves in liberalized autocracies. As Lindberg argues, any type of election has gradual influence on the quality of those elections. There are nevertheless strong grounds for considering electoral authoritarianism as a distinct theoretical category. While electoral authoritarian elections are often not free or fair, they are also not simply symbolic or facade elections. Opening all major offices for regular contestation shifts the basis of authoritarianism from raw power to some responsiveness to an electorate, the regime’s mobilization capacity, and the extent of effective opposition building. In addition,

<sup>14</sup> Diamond 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Brownlee 2007; Lust-Okar 2009. For more on the term “liberalized autocracies” and its particular relevance for the Middle East, see Brumberg 2002.

executive elections provide another focal point for elite defection and opposition coordination. This was apparent, for example, in the presidential election in Kenya of 2002 when the retirement of Daniel arap Moi provided the necessary catalyst for further party fragmentation, as well as increasing opposition unity.<sup>16</sup>

It is precisely these distinctions that are also relevant for the questions that drive Lindberg's edited volume. The ability of elections to act as a mode of transition to democracy is more likely in truly electoral authoritarian regimes. By contrast, under conditions of liberalized autocracy one can imagine that certain political dynamics are likely to be quite different. For example, Ellen Lust-Okar's other work on structures of contestation is especially relevant to this subset of cases. When political contestation is explicitly limited (that is, when only the legislature can be contested and only regime-sanctioned parties can compete), the motivation of political parties is likely to be different. If access to government privileges determines much of the political calculus, political parties will conform to certain behaviors so that they are not excluded from the legal sphere of contestation.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, in electoral authoritarian regimes opposition struggles are for the fair implementation of political rules (or the amendment of certain rules), whereas in liberalized autocracies oppositions fight for the establishment of new political rules. Middle Eastern regimes like Jordan or Morocco are qualitatively different from Mexico under the PRI or Tanzania under the CCM, where presidents have consistently run for elections. When this distinction between electoral authoritarianism and liberalized autocracy is not made, the empirical results must be qualified.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, it is more difficult to draw the distinction between electoral authoritarianism and electoral democracy, as doing so entails

<sup>16</sup> Similar points regarding the role of executive elections are provided by Magaloni, who correlates presidential approval with macroeconomic performance because the executive was perceived to be directly responsible for those policies (Magaloni 2006, 151–74).

<sup>17</sup> Lust-Okar 2005. Lust-Okar also notes the prevalence of "competitive clientelism" in the Middle East and argues that since the executive election is precluded, control over policy is not an attainable political goal. Therefore, electoral contests are over access to patronage resources, contests that tend to fragment parties (Lust-Okar 2009). A similar argument is made by van de Walle, who asserts that in African neopatrimonial regimes with legacies of strong executives and uncompetitive executive elections, incentives are created for opposition party fragmentation in order to ensure access to the privileges of state (van de Walle 2003). In another sense, the degree to which the logic of clientelism drives politics might depend on the exact nature of the election in addition to the strength of the president.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Jason Brownlee, who has been critical of new nomenclature for authoritarianism, revisits his findings in the reviewed work and finds a strong correlation between the subset of competitive authoritarianism and the likelihood that the subsequent regime will be democratic (Brownlee 2007; Brownlee 2009, 140–43). Similarly, contrast Lindberg's hypothesis regarding repeated elections with Howard and Roessler's study of the correlation between competitive authoritarianism and liberalizing electoral outcomes (Lindberg 2006; Lindberg 2009; Howard and Roessler 2006).

moving beyond minimal and procedural definitions of democracy to a more complex understanding of the freedom and fairness of elections. Alvarez and colleagues have been instrumental in establishing minimal criteria for regime classification based on four simple rules—executive selection, legislative selection, party pluralism, and alternation in power.<sup>19</sup> The purpose of these criteria is to prevent scholars from making difficult judgments regarding the quality of contestation and thus prevent classificatory errors. However, for scholars working on electoral authoritarianism, minimal definitions of democracy can no longer keep up with observed ambiguities.<sup>20</sup> As Schedler remarks, the back-coding of regimes as democratic post fact after an alternation in power is not “primary evidence of procedural integrity” and creates its own classificatory risks (p. 10). Schedler rightfully remarks that there are increasingly strong data on the quality of elections and political rights from media outlets, election observers, and research centers such as Freedom House that can allow scholars to make better judgments about democratic integrity. Roessler and Howard, Schedler, Lindberg, and Clark all make use of Freedom House scores. Others like Levitsky and Way use their own set of observations to determine a range of electoral authoritarian regimes.<sup>21</sup>

However, for more methodological purists the problems associated with assessing the quality of elections have not been sufficiently addressed. Gerardo Munck claims that research on hybrid regimes and electoral authoritarianism is guilty of methodological sloppiness and ignorant of standard practices used in large-N studies.<sup>22</sup> Munck advocates setting clear boundaries between concepts and suggests returning to Dahlian notions of regime type, measured along the two scales of contestation and participation. But while that is an admirable goal, in reality it is an immense task to accomplish. Munck acknowledges such when he writes that “the development of scales of participation and contestation hinges on complex methodological choices … many of which remain to be addressed in future work.”<sup>23</sup> That is the crucial task, however, and Munck provides no guidelines for how restrictions of electoral contestation should be aggregated, ranked, and ordered. Does a state have the right to exclude certain parties from elections? How

<sup>19</sup> Alvarez, Cheibub, Limongi, and Przeworski 1997.

<sup>20</sup> See former debates over concept formation in Coppedge 1990; Collier and Mahon 1993; Collier and Adcock 1999; Adcock and Collier 2001; Gerring 2001; Munck and Verkuilen 2002; and Goertz 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Clark 2006; Lindberg 2006; Schedler 2006; Roessler and Howard 2009; Levitsky and Way 2010. For earlier discussions on the freedom and fairness of elections, see also Elkliit and Svensson 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Munck 2006. See also Munck and Verkuilen 2002 for their critique of regime classification in the democratization literature and especially the ambiguity of Freedom House and Polity scores.

<sup>23</sup> Munck 2006, 35.

much restriction of campaign activities does it take to seriously skew elections results in the incumbent's favor?

The issue is compounded by the problem of observation in authoritarian settings. Observers must rely upon potentially tainted evidence, which is also often hidden from sight. Jonathan Hartlyn and Jennifer McCoy address the issue of "observer paradoxes," with a focus on electoral manipulation.<sup>24</sup> Choices abound in deciding how to measure electoral manipulation. Determining the legitimacy of the electoral process according to the action of oppositions (participation, boycott, acceptance, or rejection of results), though fairly simple, is also likely to be hyperbolic. Basing judgments on election observer reports is also potentially biased because they capture only a small part of the actual electoral process. Election observer groups such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) or the National Democratic Institute (NDI) have checklists for determining electoral integrity, but, as Hartlyn and McCoy note, they differ with regard to the scope and time frame of observation. Due to limitations of capacity and resources, election observers are usually confined geographically to certain regions and often only have some limited amount of time in which to prepare. How then are election observers to determine both the pervasiveness of fraud and its substantive impact on election results?

These issues of observation, measurement, and judgment are precisely what Przeworski and colleagues sought to avoid with their purely procedural definition of democracy. The exact boundary between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism will depend on the direction of the scholar's bias and the way scholars engaged in empirical research define their range of cases, based as it is on imperfect information and at times subjective judgments. For their part, Levitsky and Way employ a fairly strict definition of democracy where any violation of the fairness of elections, civil liberties, or a level playing field renders a regime nondemocratic (pp. 366–68). Most notably, the case of Botswana is classified as authoritarian rather than democratic. A snapshot comparison of 155 regime classifications between 2004 and 2008 reveals some other interesting divergence (Tables 1 and 2). All of these authors utilize some combination of Freedom House and the Polity IV index.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Hartlyn and McCoy 2006. On electoral manipulation, see also Lehoucq 2003; and on election observers, see Hyde 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Roessler and Howard consider regimes with a Freedom House score of 3 or higher and a Polity score of 6 or lower as electoral authoritarian (if elections are held for the legislature and executive). John Clark uses an additive measure of civil rights and political liberties combined with the stipulation that the regime hold at least two presidential elections. Lindberg and Schedler both use the average Freedom house score and maintain a lower threshold for democracy than Roessler and Howard, but they produce identical results.

TABLE 1  
REGIME CLASSIFICATIONS BY AUTHOR

<i>Scholars</i>	<i>Authoritarian (Including Electoral Authoritarian)</i>	<i>Democratic</i>
Alvarez et al.	67	88
Roessler and Howard	64	92
Schedler	70	85
Lindberg	70	85
Clark	83	72

TABLE 2  
CLASSIFICATION DIVERGENCE BY AUTHOR

<i>Author</i>	<i>Electoral Democracies Coded as Authoritarian by Alvarez et al.</i>	<i>Electoral Autocracies Coded as Democratic by Przeworski et al.</i>
Clark (2006)	Botswana, Ecuador, Mozambique, Paraguay	Armenia, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kenya, Lebanon, Madagascar, Malawi, Moldova, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Russia, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Venezuela
Schedler (2006)		
Lindberg (2009)	Botswana, Comoros, Ecuador, Liberia, Mozambique, Paraguay, Tanzania	Armenia, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Lebanon, Malawi, Moldova, Russia, Sri Lanka, Venezuela
Roessler and Howard (2009)	Botswana, Burundi, Comoros, Georgia, Liberia, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Paraguay	Armenia, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Haiti, Papua New Guinea, Venezuela
Roessler and Howard (Amended)	Botswana, Comoros, Paraguay	Armenia, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Sri Lanka, Venezuela

Out of the sixty-four democratic classifications generated using Roessler and Howard, Alvarez and colleagues would consider ten autocratic. Similarly, the scholars of electoral authoritarianism differ from one another with regard to the range of regimes they consider democratic. A notable difference is Schedler's classification of Tanzania as democratic.<sup>26</sup> These scholars might also be generating false positives by coding regimes as autocratic when they are actually democratic. Here there is much more divergence among electoral authoritarian scholars and between themselves and Przeworski and colleagues.

While procedural definitions of democracy are inadequate for the study of electoral authoritarianism, it seems unlikely that methodological rigidity will move us forward either. On the one hand, the disagreements might be due to a measurement problem that can be solved by more empirical work on individual cases. Perhaps greater attention needs to be given to the exact forms of electoral manipulation or organizational constraint and its consequence.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, there is a theoretical gap since scholars disagree over the extent and degree of electoral violation that render a regime nondemocratic. This has significant theoretical and practical implications. Conceptual stretching (or, alternatively, shrinking) might bias the selection of cases for research. Scholars might be tempted to define a range of cases that corresponds to their specific results. In addition, defining something as an electoral autocracy rather than an electoral democracy is an act with significant political consequence. It potentially changes the way policymakers relate to a specific country—a critique raised by Carothers as problematic in the transitions paradigm. To identify a regime as autocratic rather than minimally democratic means that the country is not necessarily on a trajectory toward deeper and more consolidated democracy.

Recognizing potential bias is a first step, but a reduction of the divergence among scholars and increased consensus on the precise range of electoral authoritarian regimes could be accomplished with a number of imperfect changes. First, Roessler and Howard's combination of multiple sources of assessment is admirable, but it might also be responsible for their identifying as electoral democracies what others code as authoritarian. Raising the Polity threshold for democracy to

<sup>26</sup> Scholars with a closer understanding of the case would generally consider it nondemocratic. See, for example, Hyden 1999. Levitsky and Way 2010 also devote a case study to it.

<sup>27</sup> Lindberg has also developed an index of the freedom and fairness of elections in Lindberg 2006. He bases his assessments on observation reports and creates a separate category of opposition boycott and opposition acceptance of electoral results to measure electoral integrity. Elections are coded as no fraud, some fraud but no impact, fraud and likely impact, fraud and certain impact. This scale has also been used by Mylonas and Roussias 2008 but only assesses the election itself and not other forms of violations of electoral integrity that might also impact the voting outcome.

seven reduces this disparity and leaves a much more marginal difference for Paraguay, Comoros, and Botswana. A second suggestion would be to incorporate Przeworski and colleagues' alternation rule, which would convert Paraguay and Botswana into authoritarian regimes.<sup>28</sup> Third, it seems that little can be done to address the deviation from Przeworski and colleagues with regard to their potential false coding of democracies without delving into issues of electoral integrity. Indicative of this is their coding of Kenya as democratic since 1997, when according to several regional scholars the years 1997–2002 were far from democratic and the post-2002 electoral environment has been consistently violated to the point of civil strife in 2008.<sup>29</sup> Reducing the discrepancies among electoral authoritarian scholars is also likely to be difficult given the various standards for democracy. Incorporating an amended Roessler and Howard again minimizes the internal disagreement. Finally, scholars should test their theories against multiple case populations of electoral authoritarianism to see whether their theoretical insights hold. This would provide a needed validity test of the conceptualization of authoritarianism based on its relationship to specific causal processes.

There is also another issue that obfuscates the classification of electoral authoritarianism—the differentiation between competitive and hegemonic authoritarianism.<sup>30</sup> The distinctions are neither consistently used nor clear and might even be more critical for theory building than the distinction between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism. Levitsky and Way consider a regime competitive if elections are free but unfair. In hegemonic regimes, the opposition is overwhelmingly restricted and repressed, rendering elections completely uncompetitive. By contrast, Roessler and Howard infer from competitive authoritarianism a sense of instability and a tendency to tip toward either hegemonic electoral authoritarianism or electoral democracy.<sup>31</sup> As a proxy for the level of competitiveness, they use a power requirement of vote share.<sup>32</sup> Magaloni considers a regime hegemonic using a longevity requirement

<sup>28</sup> Note that the Colorado Party in Paraguay lost the election in April 2008. A concern with incorporating the alternation rule is that it would also obscure the theoretical category of dominant-party regime used by Pempel 1990; and Giliomee and Simkins 1999. These are democratic regimes with long-lasting victorious parties such as the LDP in Japan (1955–2009), the Mapai in Israel (1948–68), and potentially the BDP in Botswana (1961–).

<sup>29</sup> See works by Ndegwa 2003; Kiai 2008; Chege 2008; and Mutua 2008

<sup>30</sup> Diamond 2002. The term "hegemonic party" itself dates back to Dahl 1971 and Sartori 1976, but it is unclear whether the term in the context of electoral authoritarianism is the same thing since they were referring to essentially nonelectoral contexts.

<sup>31</sup> Howard and Roessler 2006; Roessler and Howard 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Roessler and Howard use a 70 percent threshold for distinguishing competitive from hegemonic regimes. Similarly, Brownlee 2009 uses the DPI index to code regimes as noncompetitive electoral autocracies when the largest party wins more than 75 percent of the parliamentary seats.

and a less restrictive power stipulation—they need merely to win elections for at least twenty years.<sup>33</sup> Other scholars use different terminology to reflect similar variation in electoral authoritarian outcomes. Hadenius and Teorell have categories of “dominant-party multiparty” and “pure limited multiparty” regimes that potentially reflect the theoretical distinction between competitive and hegemonic.<sup>34</sup> Nicolas van de Walle distinguishes “status quo” regimes such as Burkina Faso and Mauritania from “contested autocracies” such as Cameroon or Kenya.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that so many scholars find it important to note these differences is of significant theoretical importance. In a sense, scholars are arguing that electoral authoritarianism is a familial concept or fuzzy set—unified by a shared attribute (unfair election) but differentiated by the extent of membership (how competitive the regime is).<sup>36</sup> But what aspects of competitiveness are referred to specifically? Competitiveness could refer to the election itself—the extent of constraints upon oppositions or electoral fraud that often appear in indexes of democracy or freedom. Or competitiveness could refer to actor capacity, either the opposition’s or the regime’s. These aspects are most often captured in measures of the effective number of parties, vote shares, or regime longevity. These indicators seem distant from the actual attributes of competitiveness, however, and potentially hide important qualitative differences between regimes.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the factors that make actors more or less competitive are not necessarily overtly authoritarian but instead may be structural and inherent. Likewise, hegemony does not have to indicate a regime’s use of blunt force but rather may indicate its capacity to dictate social choice or generate self-perpetuating large vote shares. These classificatory challenges also become apparent in the debates over the impact of authoritarian elections within *Electoral Authoritarianism* and *Democratization by Elections*.

## WHEN AND HOW DO ELECTIONS MATTER?

The edited volumes under review predominantly combine large-N statistical studies testing the association between electoral authoritarian-

<sup>33</sup> Magaloni 2006. However, her central argument is that hegemony was also sustained by large vote shares that reinforced the party’s strength. See also Greene 2007, who uses the term dominant party systems instead of hegemonic systems and considers it a subtype of electoral authoritarianism based on a longevity rule of twenty years.

<sup>34</sup> Hadenius and Teorell 2007; Hadenius and Teorell 2009.

<sup>35</sup> van de Walle 2002.

<sup>36</sup> For more on these terms, see Collier and Mahon 1993; Gerring 2001; Goertz 2006; and Ragin 2008.

<sup>37</sup> It is important to note that Roessler and Howard justify their 70 percent vote threshold with a robustness check against opposition boycott. Theoretically, opposition boycott indicates the invalidity of the electoral process.

ism and democratization and running plausibility probes into the factors that make elections more likely to lead to a democratic transition. A consensus emerges from the chapters that the impact of elections is highly contingent—dependent on the nature of the former regime and the context within which elections were introduced. Less clear is what factors specifically should be examined to understand the diversity of outcomes; this problem is rooted in the confusion over what is meant by competitive. Some of the chapters explore factors that tend to be proximal to the election itself, such as fraud or the opposition's strategic behavior. However, an overly intensive focus on the competitiveness of the electoral procedures veers too close to endogenous causal arguments. More productive are studies that dig deeper and examine the factors that structure elections—factors that might correspond not with the direct competitiveness of the election but with actor capacity. Only a few have begun to explore these research avenues, no doubt part and parcel of the limitations of an edited volume. Most notably, the studies are also more preoccupied with authoritarian vulnerability and opposition capacity than with regime stability and perhaps electoral hegemony.

The central theme of *Democratization by Elections* is an inquiry into whether elections can serve as a “mode of transition.” Authors like Lindberg, Hadenius, and Teorell are fairly optimistic. In their studies, repeated elections generate democratic dividends and increasing returns of democratic socialization, thus providing a pathway for a gradual shift toward electoral democracy.<sup>38</sup> However, while there is no doubt a general trend of improvement in the quality of elections, it is also important to move beyond probabilistic claims to explain variation. None have adequately answered why in some cases repeated elections have decidedly not led to improvements in their quality, for example, in Zimbabwe or Togo. Nor have they sufficiently explained the persistent issue of no turnovers despite a context of improved electoral quality. Several countries have simply peaked—reaching an improved level of electoral contestation or greater electoral competitiveness that actually sustains the regime. For these regimes, understudied in most of the reviewed works, repeated elections seem to invigorate authoritarianism rather than destabilize it.

The importance of confining the electoral argument becomes evident in several other studies. In their analysis of Latin American elections, McCoy and Hartlyn are much more skeptical of the capacity of

<sup>38</sup> Lindberg 2006; Lindberg 2009; Hadenius and Teorell 2007, 100.

elections to democratize. Instead, they refocus on the causal factors traditionally noted by democratic transition scholars: pact making, the end of civil wars, military withdrawal, and shifts in international pressure. The context of elections is also especially relevant for them. Elections that were restorative in nature had an expected onetime boost in democratic quality, while elections that were foundational were much more volatile. Regimes that gradually transitioned like Mexico and Paraguay also did not exhibit a pattern of democratic improvement after a certain point, again indicating the importance of clarifying hegemonic regimes.<sup>39</sup> In the cases where there is some support for an electoral mode of democratization—Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, El Salvador, and Nicaragua—McCoy and Hartlyn do a good job of establishing other causal factors at play, such as support from external actors and prior experience with democracy.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Roessler and Howard account for the timing of elections. Democratization at the end of the cold war was largely the result of authoritarian collapse, while later, post-1995 incumbent turnovers are more significantly associated with an electoral mode of transition.<sup>41</sup>

These results highlight two important facts. First, context matters. The origins of electoral authoritarianism could be broken down into several pathways.<sup>42</sup> For instance, democratic transitions in Latin America have followed patterns associated predominately with the withdrawal of military leaders from power and the restoration of electoral politics. The noted backslide toward electoral authoritarianism in these regimes is indicative of the challenges of deepening democracy, especially after a pacted transition to democracy.<sup>43</sup> The post–cold war context also differs regionally between the postcommunist world, the Middle East, and Africa. In the postcommunist world, the context of party collapse and at times new state formation meant that resources for electoral victory were not as readily available. Moreover, the legacy of communism weighs heavily, albeit differently, in many of these cases.<sup>44</sup> The Middle East has not experienced a true transformation to elec-

<sup>39</sup> While McCoy and Hartlyn 2009 show that Mexico and Paraguay reached a threshold of democratic improvement, they do not debunk the possibility that there might have been opposition learning as Lindberg argues happens with repeated elections.

<sup>40</sup> McCoy and Hartlyn 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Roessler and Howard 2009, 117. Brownlee 2009 echoes a similar note in his contribution to *Democratization by Elections*, with another statistical study that finds correlation between the subcategory of competitive authoritarianism and democratization.

<sup>42</sup> Some of these pathways were also covered in Levitsky and Way 2002.

<sup>43</sup> This is also why the terms “diminished democracy,” “delegative democracy,” and “unconsolidated democracy” are often associated with this region.

<sup>44</sup> McFaul 2005; Way 2005; Bunce and Wolchik 2009; Bunce and Wolchik 2010.

toral authoritarianism, despite the multiple elections held there. For the most part the executive has not been opened for regular elections, or it is essentially held by a monarchical figure. In contrast, a majority of African cases entered an era of electoral authoritarianism with the prior regime, whether military or single party, still largely intact and competing in founding elections. (See Table 3.)

Second, and relatedly, these results indicate that repeated elections and improved direct competitive conditions do not necessarily coincide with an electoral mode of transition. Other factors, which likely differ regionally and contextually, impact the capacity of oppositions and the weakness of regimes. This also means that scholars need to do a more nuanced job of differentiating between hegemonic and competitive authoritarianism, since they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. If hegemony refers to vote shares, there are several regimes that entered what one could term a “foundational pact.” This often secured the prominence of a single party, which had high mobilization capacity and elaborate party institutions that facilitated relatively free and fair elections.<sup>45</sup> They became more vulnerable when structural conditions changed rather than because of the nature of the election itself, which in turn reduced their vote share. Other states established large vote shares much more coercively, as in Cameroon or Gabon, and others were unable to generate those shares to begin with, as in Kenya.

The contingent impact of elections suggests that the role of proximal variables such as fraud or opposition behavior needs to be supplemented. By definition, all electoral authoritarian regimes engage in some form of unfair electoral behavior. The tools available are quite wide ranging—restrictions on civil liberties, vote buying, repression, ballot stuffing, and count rigging, to name a few. Autocrats, however, face a dilemma with regard to fraud since it can provide incumbents with a needed electoral edge but also lead to deep cuts in legitimacy that can be disastrous.<sup>46</sup> For this reason, Schedler concludes that levels of fraud are not statistically correlated with margins of victory.<sup>47</sup> However, Schedler is the first to admit that the “elephant of endogeneity” lurks behind his results.<sup>48</sup> Fraud can be theorized as indicative of regime

<sup>45</sup> These might include Mexico, Paraguay, Senegal, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>46</sup> Both Case 2006 and Schedler 2009 explore the role of electoral manipulation. Case studies show how manipulation can be used clumsily or skillfully and whether that leads to democratization or not. An interesting, albeit perhaps controversial, topic of study would be which types of electoral manipulation are more likely to pass public muster and which are more likely to backfire.

<sup>47</sup> A similar study has been conducted by Roessler and Howard 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Schedler 2009b, 198.

TABLE 3  
POTENTIAL PATHWAYS TO ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM AND  
SELECTED EXAMPLES

<i>Pathway</i>	<i>Collapse of Closed Authoritarianism</i>	<i>Transition from Closed Authoritarianism</i>	<i>Foundational</i>	<i>Erosion of Electoral Democracy</i>
Selected examples	Armenia (1995–) Belarus (1995–2001) Russia (2000–)	Kenya (1992–2002) Ghana (1992–2000) Togo (1993–) Tanzania (1995–)	Mexico (1929–2000) Senegal (1974–2000) Zimbabwe (1980–)	Venezuela (2005–)

breakdown and greater oppositional capacity or of conditions that have compelled incumbents to engage in such fraudulent practices to begin with. Therefore, the election itself can become less competitive as the structure of the election becomes more amenable to oppositions. Concurrently, lesser fraud can be seen as a sign of regime confidence in its capacity to win elections, leading to elections that are more competitive in terms of the actual contestation but less amenable to oppositions. The important question is not whether fraud plays a role or not in electoral outcomes but, rather, under what conditions regimes are likely to use it more often and intensively. Considering fraud as a dependent variable seems a much more productive avenue for research.

Similar issues arise when analyzing the role of opposition behavior and its decisions during elections. Essays by van de Walle, Rakner and van de Walle, Lindberg, Schedler, and Bunce and Wolchik all address the impact of opposition cohesion, protests, and boycotts. For the most part, the conclusion, echoing other empirical work, is that opposition unity is a key factor in transforming elections into democratizing or liberalizing moments.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, opposition mobilization prior to an election appears to be a key factor, and Schedler finds that protest is significantly correlated with opposition performance in both legislative and executive elections. Boycotts appear, by contrast, to be a detrimental strategy and are likely to increase the incumbent's margin of victory.<sup>50</sup> Once again, endogeneity potentially plagues these arguments; that is, opposition behavior might be indicative of changes in the vulnerability

<sup>49</sup> Howard and Roessler 2006. They confine their argument to the subset of competitive authoritarianism with reference to low vote share.

<sup>50</sup> Schedler 2009b; Lindberg 2006b.

of the regime rather than its cause.<sup>51</sup> The interaction between oppositions and incumbents is likely to be mutually constitutive and evolve over time, but this dynamic eludes several of the studies.<sup>52</sup> Returning to the example of Kenya, opposition unity did in fact increase between 1992 and 2002, due to the opposition's ability to overcome several internal divisions and its gradual adoption of better campaign methods. Yet this correlates with an increased number of elite defections from the KANU Party, especially following Moi's decision to choose Uhuru Kenyatta as his successor. Therefore, opposition behavior alone cannot explain when and how elections matter.

These early explorations indicate that we cannot conclude that less fraud or greater opposition cohesion means elections will necessarily be more meaningful or conducive to electoral transformation. More fruitful are studies which incorporate deeper variables that account for when elections are more likely to empower oppositions. Some of these approaches investigate the rules of the electoral game and the nature of inherited political institutions.<sup>53</sup> Two-round majority systems seem particularly conducive to greater electoral vulnerability and opposition cohesion (in the runoff election).<sup>54</sup> Other approaches look at factors that impact the strength of oppositions such as ethnic pluralism, economic development, international pressure, levels of public legitimacy, access to resources, and relative legislative strength.<sup>55</sup> All of these factors help account for when opposition cohesion is more or less likely to begin with. Finally, some of the studies begin to hint at regime-based variables, factors that account for the capacity of the incumbent to win elections.<sup>56</sup> While the specific variables might differ by region and con-

<sup>51</sup> With regard to opposition boycotts, Roessler and Howard test their measure of hegemonic authoritarianism against opposition boycott and find a strong correlation. But it is unclear whether oppositions boycott because the game is fixed and uncompetitive or because they would lose anyway.

<sup>52</sup> For instance, van de Walle 2006 perceives the interaction between oppositions and incumbents as a "tipping game," whereby existing levels of democracy and the possibility of an incumbent loss increase the odds of opposition unity. I have not yet seen any ideas for an interaction term, lagged variable, or instrumental variable to measure this relationship that would still not have the same endogenous pitfalls.

<sup>53</sup> van de Walle 2006, 88–92.

<sup>54</sup> The role of electoral institutions in determining electoral outcomes and party structures has also been the subject of much debate in recent years. Building on work by Neto and Cox 1997, the intersection of ethnic cleavage, ballot structure, and electoral proximity has been parsed in several different ways and resulted in a set of mixed conclusions, especially regarding its application in electoral authoritarian contexts. See, for example, Bogaards 2000; Mozaffar, Scarratt, and Galaich 2003; Mozaffar, Scarratt, and Galaich 2005; Mylonas and Roussias 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Fish 2006; van de Walle 2006, 91–92; van de Walle and Rakner 2009.

<sup>56</sup> For example, Lucan Way has written about the relationships between the regime and the state and how access to state economic resources helps incumbents win elections (Way 2005; Way 2006). McFaul 2002 also has an earlier argument that echoes Munck and Leff 1997. He looked at balances of power between challengers and the regime in the postcommunist context to explain a trichotomous

text, they offer important insights into electoral authoritarian variation and open up the discussion to a consideration of what the term competitiveness in an authoritarian setting actually means.

One of the most fruitful attempts under review is the chapter by Bunce and Wolchik on outcomes in postcommunist Europe and Eurasia. Their explanation simultaneously strives to account for variation in electoral authoritarian outcomes while incorporating structural-institutional and electoral variables. Their use of two-stage theory—one stage of which loads the political game toward greater potential for opposition gains—helps to address the discussed issues of endogeneity and better explains what is meant by competitiveness. Finding no persistent relationship between economic development, government type, corruption, or levels of civic freedoms, they claim that an electoral model of transition is needed to supplement institutional and structural analysis. However, for the electoral model to have any relevance, voters need to be convinced that the elections can produce actual results despite the authoritarian conditions. This is conditional upon the perceived vulnerability of the regime. Vulnerable regimes are those in which the longer-term economic prospects are declining, key allies have defected, power has been unsuccessfully institutionalized, there is susceptibility to changes in the international environment, and rulers have overstepped in their abuse of power and refused to campaign publicly for office.<sup>57</sup>

The attempt is noteworthy because it accounts for the evolution of regimes over time, combines variables from several levels, and is also acutely aware of the interaction between regime and opposition strength in explaining when elections matter. The attention given to the issue of regime vulnerability also helps to elaborate on the differences between hegemonic and competitive regimes. Stronger regimes do not necessarily exist in an uncompetitive environment—official rules do not necessarily preclude oppositions from competing and elections themselves are not necessarily hindered by high levels of fraud. Nor is it certain

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outcome—democracy, partial democracy, and dictatorship. Rakner and van de Walle 2009 explain opposition weakness by the presence of strong executives, who skew the incentives for party institutionalization.

<sup>57</sup> An indicative case is Serbia—growing inequality under Milosovic, the defection of the Orthodox church, the jailing and beating of youth movements, and a changed international environment at the end of the Balkan war. These factors created the conditions for an electoral model based on opposition unity and improvements in the transparency of elections (which prevents the possibility of stealing the election or of too much overt manipulation). In the case of Serbia, the vulnerability of the regime and the power of the civil society movement (largely led by the youth movement Otpor) facilitated a united opposition front behind Vojislav Kostunica in the 2000 presidential election.

that resource imbalance was a primary cause. Instead, strong regimes are simply able to win elections and dictate the electoral outcome much more easily through their delivery of longer-term economic benefits and maintenance of high levels of elite cohesiveness.<sup>58</sup> For Bunce and Wolchik, elections are crucial factors, but the deeper causal factors are the underlying pressures on the regime to replicate itself. The election itself is a highly contingent and uncertain process—if all the stars are correctly aligned a liberalizing outcome may result.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, it is the factors that underlie authoritarianism that need to be further addressed. Competitive electoral conditions do not necessarily make a regime vulnerable; that requires greater attention to additional variables. The wave of studies has revealed important information about electoral authoritarianism, but the conclusions tell only a part of the story. We now know that context matters, that not all electoral authoritarian regimes are similar, and that electoral competitiveness depends not only on the pervasiveness of electoral manipulation or the decisions oppositions make but also on much deeper forces that determine the capacity of incumbents to win elections and of oppositions to construct viable alternatives. We understand less the underpinnings of sustained electoral authoritarianism. What resources, institutions, and legacies do different types of regimes bring with them to elections? How does incumbent vote share influence stability? And what needs to change for elections to have greater capacity to forge change? In sum, we need to delve deeper into the authoritarian portion of electoral authoritarianism.

### AUTHORITARIAN INSTITUTIONS AND THE DYNAMICS OF ELECTORAL HEGEMONY AND STABILITY

In contrast to the above-mentioned essays, recent studies by Jennifer Gandhi, Adam Przeworski, and Barbara Geddes have sought to understand the intersection of authoritarianism and elections by focusing more closely on the nature of authoritarian institutions.<sup>60</sup> The perspective of these scholars is not to think of electoral authoritarianism as a new brand of authoritarianism but rather to utilize prior insights from rational and comparative institutionalism to understand how elections

<sup>58</sup> Bunce and Wolchik 2009, 256–57.

<sup>59</sup> Similar critiques were made against the democratic transition literature and its focus on strategic interaction at the time of the election rather than on deeper structural and institutional variables. For a scathing critique of the cumulative record of the democratization literature and its inattention to thick yet general theory, see, for example, Munck 2001. This also echoes Brownlee's critique of electoral authoritarianism in Brownlee 2007; and Brownlee 2009.

<sup>60</sup> Geddes 2005; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Gandhi 2007.

are secondary buttresses of authoritarian durability, alongside other institutions such as parties, legislatures, militaries, and courts. They are much less focused on the question of democratization than on the sources of authoritarian durability.<sup>61</sup> Some of these insights include the utility of elections in preventing coups, serving an informational role, and facilitating co-optation.<sup>62</sup> While these approaches address the apparent functionality of elections rather than variation in electoral outcomes, their greater attention to authoritarian institutions should be incorporated into studies of electoral authoritarianism. The strength of authoritarian institutions, and especially parties, can also be seen as a key to determining when regimes are more vulnerable to elections and when they are less so. These are some of the central insights from Magaloni and from Levitsky and Way.

There is a robust tradition of studying single-party authoritarian regimes in terms of the sources of their relative strength and weakness and their general durability vis-à-vis other forms of authoritarianism. Ruth Collier, for example, explores the origins of stable party institutions in sub-Saharan Africa by noting the timing and nature of single-party formation—whether prior to or after independence and whether by ratification, merger with other parties, or forceful exclusion of other parties.<sup>63</sup> Benjamin Smith distinguishes weak and strong parties based on the level of access elites had to economic resources and the strength of oppositions at the inception of the political regime. Regimes that faced strong opposition and had little access to resources were compelled to make compromises and create party institutions that were conciliatory and therefore long-lasting.<sup>64</sup> Barbara Geddes has famously shown how single-party regimes are likely to survive much longer than other forms of authoritarianism due to their ability to mitigate elite conflict.<sup>65</sup> Others have centered their studies on the cases of exceptionally strong electoral parties prior to the third wave.<sup>66</sup>

Beatriz Magaloni is acutely aware of these insights but places the role of elections, and especially large margins of victory, at the forefront of

<sup>61</sup> In another recent review essay on authoritarian elections, the democratization perspective receives a scant two pages of discussion (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009).

<sup>62</sup> See Geddes 1999; Acemoglu and Robinson 2005; Lust-Okar 2006; and Magaloni 2008.

<sup>63</sup> Collier 1984.

<sup>64</sup> Smith 2005. Similarly, Brownlee 2007 looks at the mitigation of elite conflict in determining the subsequent strength of single-party regimes.

<sup>65</sup> Geddes 1999. See also Bratton and van de Walle 1994 and their discussion of plebiscitary and competitive single-party regimes and their influence on the extent of public protest and likelihood of democratic transition. See also a recent review essay by Magaloni and Kricheli 2010.

<sup>66</sup> See Case 2001; Solinger 2001; Langston 2006; Magaloni 2006; Greene 2007; and Abente-Brun 2009.

her argument drawn from her detailed case study of the PRI in Mexico.<sup>67</sup> The Mexican PRI—the longest-lasting autocratic regime of the twentieth century—persistently won multiparty and multicandidate elections for seventy-one years. Unlike its cousin, the single-party autocracy, the PRI utilized popular elections as a central tool of authoritarianism by continually reaffirming its dominance and striving for large margins of victory. Magaloni does a good job of advancing the study of authoritarian parties by considering the role of elections more deeply. Her conclusion is that the party can do more than provide an institutional format for mitigating elite conflict. Hegemonic authoritarian regimes can also use the party and elections to deter defection and opposition formation by maintaining large margins of victory. Magaloni presents a game-theoretic model of equilibrium party hegemony that accounts for the absence of elite splits. Using ambition theory, she argues that as long as the best prospects for individual promotion remain within the ruling party, the likelihood of defection remains very small. The ability of the party to maintain mass support and compel citizens to support the regime are the main determinants of these prospects.

This accounts for the PRI's desire to push for very large margins of victory and at times for its use of fraud to accomplish that end: it was looking to project strength. This support is sustained by the regime's capacity to manage the economy and its maintenance of a punishment regime that distributes rewards to party supporters and punishes defectors. In the absence of either sustained economic growth or a punishment regime, fraud and the manipulation of opposition coordination dilemmas take on a much more central role in explaining authoritarian survival. To reduce the risk of ideological backlash, the regime strove to create "poverty traps" and systems of dependency with rural voters, who remained the PRI's base of support until 2000 (pp. 50–51, 68–72). Hence, this type of electoral authoritarianism became self-reinforcing as long as the structural conditions remained constant.

Magaloni's explanation of the PRI's durability posits an understanding of rural voters who ask themselves two questions—who will support me in the long run and what will it cost me to defect? The emerging empirical story is one of macroeconomic consistency until the peso crisis of the 1980s. Following the crisis, the prospects for PRI-led long-term

<sup>67</sup> It should be noted that another study of the PRI's dominance by Kenneth Greene was published soon after Magaloni. While both conceive of the PRI as being sustained by access to widespread patronage, Greene's approach differs by focusing on the supply of opposition parties, ideological pigeonholing, and opposition elite recruitment. Since this approach focuses less on the role of the PRI's large vote share and because of space constraints, it is not discussed in depth.

growth fell, evidenced in declining voter support for the president. Economic liberalization and further economic integration with the United States (a variation of structural adjustment) led to further drops in PRI support, precisely in those areas impacted the most. The PANistas drew support from new economic actors in the north, while the PRD began to establish a much smaller foothold in rural areas negatively impacted by economic liberalization. Hence, it is not only changes in economic performance but also the structural change and the nature of economic actors that are determinative. Moreover, the PRI's strategic manipulation of state economic resources during elections (budget cycles) was itself partially responsible for the debt crisis of 1982 and a prelude to the neo-liberal period (pp. 119–20). Flooding the state with cash during elections increased the party's margin of victory and projected strength but also sowed the seeds of its own downfall. After the debt crisis of 1982, the PRI found it much more difficult to sustain the support of peasants and resorted to opposition deterrence strategies and vote buying. As evidence, Magaloni tests the impact of municipal-level spending for a poverty-reduction program known as PRONASOL, which was withdrawn from defectors and bestowed upon supporters (pp. 125, 149–50).

Magaloni also provides explanations regarding the PRI's ultimate downfall. As she sees it, the continued deterioration of economic conditions forced the PRI into a much more competitive environment after the 1988 election. Of crucial significance was the establishment of federal-level election monitoring with the IFE—a PRI compromise to prevent violence in the 1994 election. This altered the incentives of the electoral game and provided the opposition and its supporters with a clearer informational environment. Using voter surveys, Magaloni concludes that perceptions about the possibility of postelection violence changed and facilitated greater support for opposition parties. By 2000 Vicente Fox was able to ride a wave of popular support, and with the PRI's ability to manipulate the election without backlash hindered, it succumbed to an electoral transition.

The synthesis in this work of insights from modernization theory, political economy, rational choice, institutionalism, and transitions theory makes a strong argument about the role of authoritarian elections and the nature of hegemonic regimes. Elections served a uniquely authoritarian purpose for the PRI by providing the structure for mass mobilization that held the party together. Elections provided opportunities for the party to maintain popular support, a system of economic transfers, and even a commitment to policy-centric appeals. As structural conditions changed, the party found it much more difficult to sustain

large margins of victory in elections without resorting to greater levels of fraud. Magaloni provides evidence that corresponds with Bunce and Wolchik's argument regarding electoral transitions and shows that the capacity of oppositions to use the election as a mode of transition hinged on their ability to increase the transparency of the election and to widen their appeal. Therefore, Magaloni also elaborates on what hegemony and competitiveness are and shows that they do not necessarily correspond with greater levels of fraud or repression. The PRI engaged in comparatively low levels of fraud and instead used fraud strategically to generate large vote shares that deterred oppositions and facilitated an authoritarian equilibrium.

Magaloni is not as interested in the question of the origins of the relatively benign hegemonic authoritarianism of the PRI's brand as she is in their dynamics. For instance, the ability of the PRI to establish consistent hegemonic vote shares seems to depend on the range of political alternatives at the inception of the ruling regime, the economic and demographic structure of society, and the initial policies of the regime. Without a practically nonexistent opposition at the time of the revolution, a large rural base, or the construction of corporatist structures, could the PRI have maintained such influential vote shares?<sup>68</sup> Only through these policies was the PRI able to establish "poverty traps" that kept rural peasants beholden to the party even as their economic interest in the party was fading. Similarly, it appears that it is also the ability of the regime to adapt to the requirements of structural adjustment that helps explain party durability. In the PRI's case, an entrepreneurial class emerged largely independent of the party and of a state that was rapidly shedding its state-owned industries in the 1980s. By contrast, ruling parties elsewhere have kept emerging urban business classes tied to the party, providing them with new financial resources and a basis of support.<sup>69</sup>

In addition, while Magaloni provides detailed empirical evidence, her combination of a choice-theoretic model and a sole focus on Mexico has its limitations. While able to provide a logical explanation of hegemonic equilibriums and decline based essentially on a calculation of the marginal utility voters find in supporting the party, it does not explain the origin of these preferences. Why did rural peasants in Mexico feel so

<sup>68</sup> Similar contexts existed in Tanzania where the TANU Party faced little resistance, a rural population, and embarked on a socialist-driven attempt to reshape society (see Bienen 1970). This was also part of what made the Tunisian Neo-Destour Party so strong in its earlier years (see King 2003).

<sup>69</sup> On contingent democratic classes, see, for example, King's discussion of Middle East coalitions in King 2003; King 2009; or see Bellin 2000.

beholden to the PRI? Their preferences emerged within an institutional context of PRI dominance and the construction of an extremely strong party apparatus. This will be a significant test of Magaloni's theory and approach, as it is extended to other cases where hegemony might not be sustained by similar punishment-reward schemes or similar preferences. In addition, the selection of Mexico as a case study of hegemonic authoritarianism presents a certain element of bias, since it is a regime that has since become fairly open. Undoubtedly, this is what allowed Magaloni such access to the inner workings of the PRI, but it does mean that the scope of her argument needs to be replicated with additional empirical studies.

By contrast, Levitsky and Way provide one of the most ambitious attempts at synthesis and large-scale case comparisons in recent years. Their volume encompasses thirty-five case studies, spanning the globe from Latin America to Africa, and then brings them all together into a parsimonious theoretical structure that emphasizes structural-institutional variables over rational choice explanations (p. 83). It is no small feat to manage such extensive data; at the same time this may also be the study's major shortcoming. In an attempt to consolidate as much information as possible, the work might seem to some as too restricted by the theoretical construct laid out at the beginning of the book. For those with closer knowledge of the individual cases, much of the nuance and detail are probably lost, and they would likely find that alternative arguments are not always given their due. Regardless, this is one of the few attempts to incorporate authoritarian institutions and move the study of electoral authoritarianism (or competitive authoritarianism) beyond the electoral act itself and thereby explain the wide variation in electoral authoritarian outcomes in a comparative setting.<sup>70</sup>

Their explanatory variables are linkage with Western powers, Western power leverage, and incumbent organizational power. It is refreshing to see attention given to international factors in a systematic way that does not just measure democratic proximity as a proxy for democratic diffusion. Linkage, which is Levitsky and Way's primary explanatory variable and refers to the range of interactions with a Western state, impacts the propensity for democratic elections by creating stronger democratic constituencies within the state itself. Leverage, by contrast, relates to the punitive aspect of relationships with external powers. Regimes that have larger economies are subject to competing foreign

<sup>70</sup> Levitsky and Way use their definition of competitive authoritarianism rather than electoral authoritarianism. As mentioned above, this use of the term is not necessarily accepted by all scholars.

policy objectives, or “black knight” regimes (authoritarian regimes supported by an external power for stability or economic policy reasons), are scored as low on leverage. Organizational capacity combines measures of the state’s capacity for coercion, party strength, and economic power. Levitsky and Way have gone to great lengths to measure these variables using replicable indicators such as the size of the military, past military coup attempts, and the party’s ideological and institutional cohesion and scope. The variables combine to explain three different outcomes—stable authoritarianism, unstable authoritarianism (where there has been regime turnover but no democratic consolidation), and democratization.

Linkage stands out as a primary variable for their theory of electoral authoritarian transition to democracy and largely differentiates between Eastern Europe and the Americas. In cases where linkage is not as high, the role of organizational power becomes more paramount. Hence, regardless of organizational power or leverage, when linkage was high the outcome was likely democratic and competitive authoritarian elections were in fact a temporary phase. In other cases, high organizational power kept authoritarianism intact; in cases where organizational power was not as strong, however, the role of leverage determined whether the regime was stable or unstable (p. 72). Part of the argument does edge on the tautological—finding that democracy was more likely when societies were more democratic. In cases of East European democratization it is also likely that it is not just the prior extent of linkage but the desire for more linkage with the EU and a break from a communist past that drove the outcome. The more interesting part of the analysis is in the cases where linkage is not as high and where the role of leverage and especially organizational strength come into play. It is here where they move from a study of comparative democratization to a study of comparative electoral authoritarianism.

The cases of lower linkage are found in the former Soviet Union, Africa, and Asia. The insights are largely institutional, with great attention given to the role of incumbent authoritarian parties and to the role of coercive capacity. There is notable variation across regions. As expected, in post-Soviet cases the extent of organizational power was low (with the exception of Armenia) due to the collapse of communism. In contrast, the African and Asian cases reflect much more variety with regard to organizational power. Of note in Africa are cases where despite high levels of leverage, high levels of organizational capacity sustained electoral authoritarianism. These cases include Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. In other cases, lower organizational power

was mitigated by lower levels of leverage. Two “black knight” cases are especially important—Cameroon and Gabon, where extensive French support of the Biya and Bongo regimes sustained authoritarianism despite lower organizational capacity. It is noteworthy, however, that in the post-Soviet and African cases, while the theory does a good job of explaining stable versus unstable authoritarian outcomes, it does not provide a theory of democratization within the context of low linkage, and the causes of unstable authoritarianism versus democratization are not as clear.<sup>71</sup>

Levitsky and Way have been trailblazers, opening an impressive path for deeper studies of electoral authoritarianism. Nonetheless, the scope of their project is also its key weakness—an unsurprising result given the range of outcomes and cases they wish to combine. First, certain variables like organizational power feels slightly undertheorized, especially with regard to political parties. In comparison with Magaloni, who suggests that robust electoral authoritarian parties are those that can establish important social relationships, Levitsky and Way focus more on the physical apparatus of the party and the degree of elite cohesion with reference to ethnicity or revolutionary origin (pp. 61–66, 377–78). Less well articulated are those aspects of party strength that are more social and that might correspond with its mobilization capacity or distributional coalitions. With regard to state coercive capacity, while it is important to move beyond earlier measures like military spending as a percentage of GDP, the inclusion of both party strength and coercive capacity as equal aspects of organizational strength might be misleading (pp. 58–59, 376). The role of coercive capacity depends not only on its physical dimensions but on willingness, which is also determined by the extent of leverage. This is a frequent theme in their study, as, for example, when they note the high coercive capacity that Milosevic enjoyed but attribute the unwillingness of the military and police to help him steal the 2000 election to years of international pressure and high linkage. By contrast, parties do not seem to depend as much on that context.

Second, the role of alternative variables is not always given a fair chance, even when they have credible theoretical value to add. The role of opposition strength, in particular, is dismissed by Levitsky and Way as secondary. Using the metaphor of “three little pigs,” they argue that it is the strength of the “house” (regime) that matters and not the fact

<sup>71</sup> One case they note as an exception to their theory is Ghana, where they expected unstable authoritarianism but coded it as a democracy. They attribute the democratization of Ghana to the determination of Jerry Rawlings in creating credible democratic institutions (pp. 299–305).

that there are “wolves” (oppositions) (pp. 68–70). However, not all oppositions are equally equipped and in fact in some of their case studies it appears to be of the utmost importance. In their section on Russia they write: “Putin succeeded in consolidating authoritarian rule mainly by eliminating key organizational sources of vulnerability. In a context of low leverage and a weak opposition, he met virtually no resistance” (p. 200). Similarly, the role of the opposition comes up in the cases of Mexico, Peru, Serbia, Ghana, Senegal, Zambia, and Taiwan. Other alternative variables they test are economic, using measures of modernization, inequality, and economic performance (p. 74). While it is true that economic crises are mitigated by the organizational capacity of states, longer-term trends in economic performance were central in Magaloni’s explanation of the decline of the PRI. A final alternative variable is the role of institutional design; they limit it to choices of presidentialism versus parliamentarism, however, instead of giving the approach a better chance at challenging their argument by incorporating ballot structure or other variables from this wide literature.

A major strength of the project is its incorporation of sturdier institutional variables that help explain important variation in electoral authoritarian outcomes. On the one hand, this is a study of democratization, offering strong evidence that high levels of linkage are a central factor in the post–cold war era. On the other hand, this is a study of comparative electoral authoritarianism, drawing distinctions between stable and unstable forms that hinge on organizational capacity and leverage. The term “stable authoritarianism” in a sense corresponds to other scholars’ use of the term “hegemonic authoritarianism,” especially if the intention is to identify the longevity of the regime. Levitsky and Way do not, however, conceive of hegemonic authoritarianism as a regime noted for its important large vote shares in the same way that Magaloni sees it. Moreover, there are notable differences between the stable regimes. For example, the persistent electoral victories that Tanzania produces are qualitatively different from those of Zimbabwe, which in recent years has been forced to rely on coercion and outright election stealing. An electoral authoritarian outcome like Zimbabwe’s is sustained not by its electoral capacity but by its coercive capacity. This has precluded it from generating hegemonic vote shares, and its mere survival does not seem to be the same thing as regime stability. Indeed, at times it seemed that Zimbabwe’s elites were acting in a highly improvisational manner to stay in power.

To understand this type of variation would require further specification of electoral authoritarian outcomes, thickening concepts like

the political party, perhaps disaggregating organizational power, and reconsidering some alternative variables such as opposition behavior or economic performance. It would most likely also call for more confined studies that examine electoral authoritarianism in certain contexts or for more specific outcomes. Importantly, it would also require thinking more deeply about what the terms competitive and hegemony actually mean. Do vote shares matter? Is competitiveness a measure of the constraints upon oppositions and the degree of fraud, or is competitiveness a measure of regime vulnerability and actor capacity?

#### LOOKING FORWARD: GAINING CONCEPTUAL CLARITY AND THEORETICAL LEVERAGE

The conceptual shift toward electoral authoritarianism has launched a robust research program that is in need of greater consensus and direction. Debates have emerged regarding ways to define the object of study, when and how elections serve a democratizing versus an authoritarian function, and how elections interact with other authoritarian institutions such as the political party. A number of themes have driven this article: the necessity for greater conceptual clarity, contextual analysis, and attention to deeper institutional and structural variables and a distinction between the competitiveness of the election and the competitiveness of the actors. In sum, how do we integrate what is a prolific field into a sounder comparative structure? One solution offered here is to find ways to grow conceptual consensus among scholars without completely betraying methodological concerns. Information regarding the quality of elections is imperfect but has continually improved and can be incorporated into sturdy conceptualizations. A second solution offered is to confine arguments to similar contexts with regard to the origins and timing of electoral authoritarianism. The emergence of electoral authoritarianism in the new states of Central Asia is bound to follow a different pattern from that seen in Africa. The context of authoritarian collapse versus authoritarian erosion or adaptation is going to be quite different. Finally, to avoid conflating competitiveness with vulnerability, it is necessary to move beyond the electoral act itself and incorporate insights from the study of authoritarian institutions and structural variables. The contributions by Bunce and Wolchik, Magaloni, and Levitsky and Way offer some good preliminary ideas for how to integrate elections and institutions.

However, we now need studies that explore the underpinnings of electoral authoritarian variation. Large-N studies require conceptual-

izations that often brush over important qualitative differences between regimes. The use of vote-share thresholds or longevity requirements to distinguish hegemonic from competitive authoritarianism does not help us understand what makes an electoral authoritarian regime tick or what factors make elections more conducive to authoritarian stability or instability. This article suggests that the next stage for research on electoral authoritarianism needs to be case driven—contextual small-to-medium-N comparisons with the explicit goal of midrange theory building and concept formation. Closer interaction with data will help clarify the factors that make elections democratic or authoritarian, what factors make elections more or less competitive, what factors empower oppositions, and what factors make regimes more or less vulnerable to opposition challenges. No doubt, the study of authoritarianism at this level is a difficult challenge given the opaqueness of the inner workings of authoritarian regimes, but it is nonetheless necessary.

One basis for smaller case comparisons is to focus more attentively on a central institution of electoral authoritarianism—the authoritarian party. As already mentioned, authoritarian parties have been the subject of volumes of research. However, our studies are more relevant for understanding single parties in the context of closed authoritarianism and not electoral politics.<sup>72</sup> Quite often the term “single party” is often simply amended with the adjective strong or weak to note whether it has survived elections or not. Alternatively, institutional elements are added as hyphenations to the party (for example, military-single party). Another recent attempt by Gunther and Diamond to classify political party types resulted in fifteen different parties ranging from “Post-Industrial Extreme Right” to “Socialist-Class-Mass.”<sup>73</sup> These party types are not necessarily conceptualized with reference to their authoritarian tendencies or their capacity to win elections. It might be important to note that electoral authoritarian regimes competed with parties that had very different types of foundational members. A broad distinction could be made between civilian, military, and revolutionary founding figures. These differences might reflect something about the capacity of the party to create elite cohesion and their wherewithal to construct strong party institutions. Civilian leaders theoretically should have more competence with regard to institution and coalition building, as they are often career politicians or leaders. In contrast, military leaders

<sup>72</sup> Former attempts classified during the growth of single-party regimes in the 1960s tended to focus on mass-elite and revolutionary-pragmatic distinctions. See Hodgkin 1961; Coleman and Rosberg 1966; and Kirchheimer 1966.

<sup>73</sup> Gunther and Diamond 2003.

are likely to have much less prior experience in politics or extensive ties with social sectors that could support the regime. The phenomenon of military-founded parties is especially relevant in the African context, where, unlike in Latin America, transitions to multiparty elections often involved military leaders quickly forming a party to compete in elections (for example, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, The Gambia, or Mauritania). The relative instability of these regimes could be attributed to the weakness of their party institutions vis-à-vis their capacity to exert physical coercion. Finally, although revolutionary leaders often brought with them large amounts of public legitimacy and elite cohesion, they might also suffer from the challenges of shifting from a revolutionary mindset to civilian politics.<sup>74</sup>

To understand authoritarian party strength, we need to address as well the extent of party institutionalization and the party's relationship to the broader political system.<sup>75</sup> Strong authoritarian parties are those that were able to establish a physical grasp over large tracts of the country. For instance, the Mexican PRI and the Tanzanian TANU/CCM parties both utterly dominated the political landscape at their inception. This facilitated the construction of robust party institutions—in the case of Tanzania, down to a ten-house cell level.<sup>76</sup> In both cases the party met regularly, held intensive internal competition for parliamentary candidates, and rotated the presidency. This relegated opposition parties to niche positions, from which, in the case of Mexico, it took them decades to escape.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, other parties invested much less in their party's institutions, and instead the office of the presidency, civil service, or even the military became central. In Kenya, the KANU Party, while revitalized somewhat by Moi, was more of a paper tiger under Jomo Kenyatta. It rarely held meetings and had much less say over the direction of national policy.<sup>78</sup> Another interesting example is the Fretilmo Party in Mozambique, which, while a relatively strong party, does not have the same reach as the PRI or CCM. As one side in the bloody Mozambican civil war, it faced stiff competition from its formal rival Renamo, especially in the 1995 and 1999 elections, in which outcomes were not so overdetermined as in Tanzania or Mexico.

Finally, in addition to considering the physical breadth of the party, studies need to address the social aspects of authoritarian parties. Parties in authoritarian and democratic settings not only are platforms

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Deonandan, Close, and Prevost 2007.

<sup>75</sup> Used in studies by Geddes 1999; Kuenzi and Lambright 2001; and Brownlee 2007.

<sup>76</sup> Bienen 1970.

<sup>77</sup> This is the topic of Greene 2007.

<sup>78</sup> See the debates in Barkan 1984; and Barkan 1994

designed to solve the difficulties of elite coordination but they also often have a deep, long-lasting social impact. This could include formal institutions or distributional coalitions. For example, the creation of corporatist structures that organize the social interests of labor, trade, women, and youth and ties them to the ruling party can significantly strengthen the party. These enduring corporatist structures provide avenues for voter socialization and are also likely to be a key tool of mobilization and support during elections. In addition, party policies and legacies often have deep impacts on how society relates to the party. Remnants of Communist Parties that competed in the former Soviet Union are likely to have suffered from severe disconnections from significant amounts of social support. However, in other cases parties are associated with independence, liberation, or even development—social legacies that often take generations to shed. This can inhibit the ability of opposition parties to carve out an electorate and can also provide parties with reliable turnout for elections. To return to the example of Tanzania, one of the legacies of the TANU/CCM Party has been a form of African socialism (*ujamaa*) that involved villagization of large amounts of the population. While this experiment utterly failed, for many of the rural subsistence agricultural regions of Tanzania, socialism brought basic services for the first time, including water, medical care, and education.<sup>79</sup> As a related matter, parties vary in the extent to which they have been able to capture emerging business interests that could have served as the basis for opposition. These social sectors might have seen regimes through periods of structural adjustment and kept the party flush with cash.

While these suggestions are not exhaustive, they can provide a sturdier basis for comparative analysis that reconnects institutions and electoral authoritarianism. This could be combined with a reassessment of the terms “competitive” and “hegemony” as dependent variables. Indeed, we will probably find that these terms need to be amended to address both the extent of electoral manipulation and the role of vote share. There might actually be competitive hegemonic regimes—regimes, such as Tanzania or Mexico, that can generate large vote shares with minimal levels of fraud and repression. By contrast, there might be noncompetitive hegemonic regimes that utilize high levels of force to generate nearly unbelievable vote shares as in Tunisia or Equatorial Guinea. Similarly, there might be nonhegemonic competitive regimes like Ghana or nonhegemonic noncompetitive regimes like Cameroon

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Hyden 1980; or Barkan 1984; and Barkan 1994.

or Gabon. In each subset of cases, the factors that lead to that outcome are likely to differ, as will the factors that enable elections to become more meaningful and empower oppositions. One could ask, for instance, how differences in party capacity and legacy impact the propensity of regimes to hold more competitive elections and their ability to generate hegemonic vote shares. Not only does this have consequences for sturdy theory building, but it will also provide a more accurate understanding of the current era of electoral authoritarianism.

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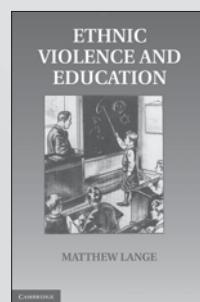
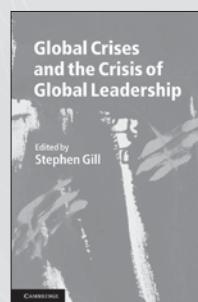
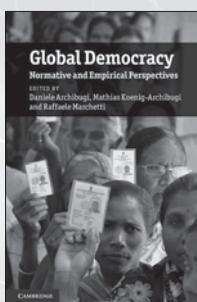
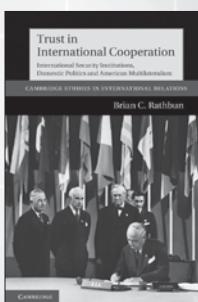
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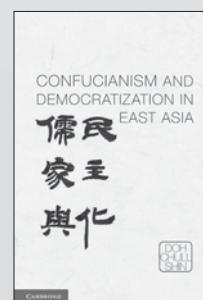
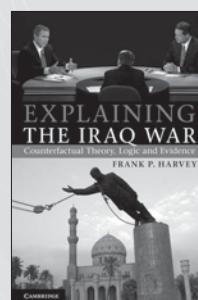
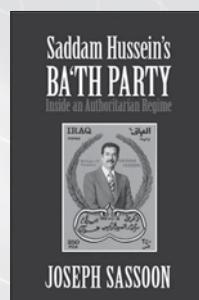
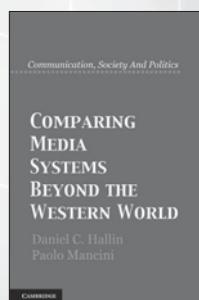
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